



“Viral Technology” Engaging IT with Zoë Hayden

■ **Threads: What attracted you to information technology as a profession?**

Zoë: It kind of happened by accident, but in retrospect working with computers is something I've always been inherently good at, so it makes sense. I studied writing, literature, and publishing at Emerson College and graduated in 2012, but in 2010 that's also where I started my career working at the IT Help Desk as a student employee. I made my very best friends while working there and also was afforded uncommon opportunities to develop a professional skillset. I think it was something that came naturally and also appealed to my love of solving problems and helping others. Ultimately, I love the satisfaction that comes with those things and that's why I've stuck with it ever since.

■ **Threads: How would you describe the value of information technology?**

Zoë: Technology is only as good as how it is used and applied. Something I say a lot is that people are smart, but computers are stupid. They don't have sentience or empathy and there is no mathematical formula that can determine how those things work, despite what marketing firms and social media websites that work with AI might want to tell us. The value of information technology is in how it facilitates bringing people together. Humans have as of late been using information technology and the internet in increasingly evil and craven ways, but on the flip side we have also been granted unprecedented opportunities to experience togetherness and love as a human race. The value is really in us as members of our human community. Technology itself is not a value proposition, because it can be so easily misused. It's a neutral capability that we make good by being good people.

■ **Threads: What story can you share that explains how your work (or other people's sense of your work) has changed in term 3 at George School this academic year?**

Zoë: I've really watched George School be its best self since all of this started. I've been helping out with the Admission panels which are being broadcast to prospective families who are still interested in coming to GS, covering a variety of topics. It has been one of those rare occasions I think where everything seems to fall into place—the tech works and the people do, too. Jordan has been doing an amazing job leading these panels, but the real stars are our students and our faculty. Getting to sit behind the scenes in my support role and watch them talk about George School has been an absolute delight for me.

Also, people in the community have always been so kind to me, but everyone has been extra gracious and patient with me during these challenging times, and I feel like I've been able to do even more for folks than usual. The last time I was this busy, I was in a terrible work environment and I came home every day and was in tears because of how stressed I was. Now, I just feel satisfied and tired at the end of the day. It's so different, and sad since we are not all together, but it's also so wonderful because I feel so supported and appreciated by my colleagues.

■ **Threads: Some in society have characterized technology as an antagonist/enemy to face-to-face community. Our current moment requests physical distancing, which requires many to lean on technology for connection. As you consider this paradox as an IT professional, what reflections would you offer the people of the world about our use of technology in these pandemic days?**

Zoë: I have never found technology to be an antagonist or enemy of face-to-face community. I just got married on Saturday to my wife whom I met on Twitter. I have been creating real friendships online since I was 11 years old. I've met many of these friends in person. Some of them I haven't, but that doesn't mean they are less important to me. I'm struggling just as we all are with being physically distant from my loved ones, though I suppose I'm better prepared than most, since I have been living alone for almost 5 years and already know how to maintain relationships online. If you don't know how to do that, here is my advice: practice being yourself and being comfortable with yourself in empty, quiet space. Meditate and journal and keep records of how you are feeling. Schedule video calls with your best friends. Read a thread on an online forum about a topic that interests you passionately. Take long walks. If being yourself online doesn't come naturally to you, I think those are the things that will help you get more comfortable with it.

■ **Threads: What dreams do you think information technology as a field will dream/may have the capacity to dream as a result of its experience of the 2020 global health crisis?**

Zoë: I think above all else IT professionals are realizing the importance of ethics in our field. We are all getting a wakeup call not only about how important our work is, but the need for transparency and guidelines for use and implementation that are informed by human empathy. I think people at the top of this industry may be in for a rude awakening, because if anything, tech is going to need to simplify and become more flexible and less proprietary, which means the focus is going to come away from profits and "innovation" and "disruption." Disruption is the last thing we need right now. New tech that comes in the future, I think, is going to feel natural and delicate, rather than powerful (if it's a good future, which I hope it will be). And it's going to help us solve very basic problems, rather than inventing problems for us to solve.